



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Source: *The American Catholic Sociological Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Mar., 1946), pp. 24-32

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3707699>

Accessed: 01-07-2018 19:47 UTC

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An Anatomy of Racial Intolerance

ERIK R. V. KUEHNELT-LEDDIHN

"Ainda que somos negros gente somos a alma tenemos"

Portuguese proverb

THERE are two major forms of intolerance (and of discrimination which is the inevitable byproduct of intolerance): intolerance toward ideas and intolerance toward people. These two manifestations are basically separate phenomena, and even the tendency of our time to confuse issues and to create chaos in thinking has not obliterated all fundamental differences between them. Of course, simple minds will inevitably attack persons *qua* persons, although they are merely carriers of ideas, but the fact remains that our intolerance toward human beings who do not share our religious or political beliefs is (originally at least) impersonal. Catholics persecuted heretics and vice versa, royalists and republicans exiled each other because they wanted to silence, to restrain or to eliminate people who attacked ideas, concepts and a way of life which they considered sacrosanct. Men in past ages defended their God and the tenets they held true by ringing words; if these failed, they resorted to force. But actually they wanted to win over all those who disagreed with them. Persecution was an acknowledgment of failure. A policy of "open arms" has nothing to do with personal animosities. And there was more joy over the convert than over the seventy-seven orthodox who had never faltered.

The degree of our religious or political intolerance depends from a whole score of factors: our temperament, the strength of our convictions, the very character of our ideology. Past centuries with their great stress on (feudal or nonfeudal) loyalty punished apostasy severely but the congenital heterodox had by the standards of 1944 at least a tolerable existence. Jews in the Middle Ages were, against all papal and royal admonitions, often victimized by the mob and exiled by the rulers. Christians and Jews, as "Peoples of the Book" lived as second-class citizens relatively unmolested under the sultans. But neither the Jews in the West nor Christians and Jews in the East could be legally forced to give up their religion. The increased tolerance toward ideas in some countries today is due partly to the

cognition that ideas cannot triumph by force alone and partly to the fact that most people are less sure, less convinced about the absolute validity of their ideology. Ours is an age of emotions rather than of convictions.

This is also the reason why intolerance toward persons for their inborn physical traits, their psychological makeup and their very personality is on the increase. To a certain extent the misanthropist and the misogynist belong in that category, but the typical modern representative of personal intolerance is the (ethnic-linguistic) nationalist and, even more so, the racialist. We admit that racialism can be rationalized and thus intellectually "justified" (as most of our other vices); there is also little doubt that it can exist in the guise of religion, as among the Jews of the Old Testament (Cf. 1 Esdras 9 and 10 and Nehemia 13) and the Shintoists, or that it can rely on the help of a servile science as in national socialism. Yet in essence it is emotional and based on an *a priori* hostility. The nationalist, at least, still holds out a slim hope to the young person still capable of assimilation, but the racialist is defiant to the end. He has never opened his arms and his will for elimination has nothing to do with the disappointment of the rejected lover. His language is "biblical" yet in conformity with the Nuremberg Laws: "Thou art damned to the third and fourth generation." And the alternative he offers is that of docile, animal subjection or brutal annihilation.

In the Middle Ages, reserving emotions to the mobs while the intellectuals cultivated an "arid scholasticism," racialism was unknown. The Parsifal legend featured Feirefitz, the hero's gallant mulatto brother, whose face was checkered as a chessboard. Pope Anaclet II was Jewish born and the idea that the Jewish people were bad (*qua* race and not *qua* religion) would have caused great hilarity among Christians whose Savior, whose greatest saint and first pope, had been physically Israelites. Prayers for the conversion of the Jews had to be said on Good Friday, and the baptism of a Jew in a city was celebrated by the whole community. It is also significant that the papal ghettos of Avignon and of Rome were the only ones in Europe which had always been efficiently guarded against the wrath of the populace envious of the banking and commercial privileges of the Jews. The two aims, conversion and extermination, are so different that to call Nazism medieval is far off the mark; no philosophy of emotions and of incorrigible fatality could develop in the shadow of Rome.

When we speak about "racial problems" we have to bear in mind that the problem concerns ourselves, our reactions, our attitudes as well as the glib pseudo-rational deductions from our superficial impressions. In order to limit our investigation we will deal merely with the psychology of racialism in this country, and pick out three major groups:

1. Negroes, who are considered to be "inferior" and have therefore to "be kept in their place."
2. Jews and Orientals, whose intellectual abilities are not doubted. They are not "inferior" but "dangerous."
3. The cognate group of South and East European immigrants who, lacking strong racial or religious barriers, have assimilated to an extent which makes them "less dangerous" than people used to think. The opposition against them was largely based on the fear of "cheap labor." This fear together with its numerous rationalizations has largely abated. The Chinese and many of the "Bohunks" were even "gallant allies."

We have stated before that racial intolerance is largely emotional. In other words; the very sight, the nearness, the presence of a person of another race creates an animosity, a dislike and an uneasiness which is even more marked if such a person assumes an attitude of social and human equality toward the "objector." Which, then, are the psychologic factors creating such an amazing situation?

The generic answer is: a feeling of inferiority. Cruelty without hatred is rare, but hatred without fear is unthinkable. And in turn there is no fear without some feeling of inferiority (and helplessness). Now, it is not absolutely necessary that this aforementioned inferiority complex stands in direct connection with a specific human object. There are people who feel (consciously or subconsciously) inferior "all around," and it braces their ego to think that millions of other people, on account of their race, are "automatically" inferior to them. Such people are racialists because the very idea of their own "racial superiority" acts as a necessary corset to their starved personalities. It is obvious that such human beings deprived of the perhaps less destructive sop of class pride are more prone to become rabid racialists; racial intolerance is, therefore, more pronounced among the lower classes, as for instance among the poor white trash of the South and in the lower middle class of Europe (and the U. S.). Nothing is more erroneous than to see in

heel-clicking junkers with monocles and horsewhips the mainstays of German Anti-Judaism. It is the schoolteacher who formed the largest single group in the Nazi party.¹

This is only a small part of the explanation of this modern, disquieting phenomenon of racialism. We have to bear in mind that the outstanding characteristic of modern times, as compared to past centuries, is identity as opposed to diversity. It so happened in the Middle Ages that not two human beings had exactly the same civil status, rights and duties. Every major city had its own laws, measures, constitution, way of life. Mass manufacture was extremely rare and hence generally no two products of the same artisan were the same. There was no equality, and liberty existed under the form of privileges which meant: "I am privileged to do something you cannot do!" Our age has passed through a libertarian period and approaches a century of equality. Yet equality is the blood brother of identity. The terrifying, totalitarian movements of our age are illiberal to the core, but preach a gospel of identity of sameness. Our culture strives to eliminate the more salient differences between men and women, between the generations, between the various parts of the country — it is centralizing, unifying, depersonalizing. The totalitarians endeavor to establish a unique pattern among their citizenry. One government decrees the Nordic race ideal, another country the proletarian norm, a third country becomes the prey of ethnic uniformism. Of course, the majority is usually taken as the pattern and the minorities are expected to conform. Yet racial minorities are by their very nature incapable of conforming. The alternative is banishment, the concentration camp, gas chambers, and the artificial starvation of the dissenters whose "crime" cannot even be amended; a proscribed mother language, "nonaryan" parents or titled grandparents are assaults against the new tyrannical law of averages.

There still remains the question of the psychological origin for this sudden frenzy for identity. Why this frantic desire for sameness? The roots for this urge are manifold. The fear to "stick out" and to attract attention, thus increasing self-consciousness, is

¹ Gunnar Myrdal in *An American Dilemma*, the most authoritative book on the Negro question so far, acknowledges that racial intolerance is least developed in the established upper classes. Franz Neumann in his *Behemoth* lists as Nazis with a background of schoolteachers: Himmler, Streicher, Rust, the two Wagners, Bürckel — a terrifying collection indeed.

of little importance. The subconscious wish to broaden one's ego by extending it to all other persons cannot be overlooked. Such an attitude is egocentrism in its literal form, and egocentrism, after all, is the most obvious alternative to theocentrism which gradually fades out. If God's objective point of view shall not prevail because His very existence is denied, then "our" subjective angle is paramount; and the "we" naturally embraces and includes the "I," if it is not a multiplication or a projection of I's. To this must be added a certain feeling of inferiority which we have toward the "stranger." We think that we cannot read his mind, but that he sees us as clearly as an interrogating police officer sees a freshly arrested criminal sitting under a 500-watt lamp. His personality is a mystery in which we do not share; his yellow or black face is a "mask" hiding his personal secret. We try to rationalize his inferiority which we loudly assert, but as persons as well as members of a race we have a fear increased by our bad conscience and deep down in our minds a feeling of being handicapped, of being, in some mysterious respect, inferior after all. It is exactly this very sentiment, though never openly admitted, that turns us into haters of an aggressive sort believing that attack is the best form of defense. Such acts increase our uneasiness, our bad conscience and the vicious circle of racial intolerance is thus complete.

It is obvious that racial intolerance will not be successfully combated by "enlightenment" or by "more education." These measures can deal only with symptoms; but not with the causes of that malady; they can be used effectively to combat the various rationalizations of our emotional disturbances² and spiritual ugliness, of which there are so many. Haven't we heard often enough that the Negro is inferior because a) he is "nearer to the animal," b) because he is a descendant of slaves, c) because he is lazy, unintelligent, untrustworthy, unstable, unimaginative, sexually uncontrolled? All these rationalizations are mere excuses which serve to exculpate otherwise indefensible attitudes. They can easily be refuted, for instance, by pointing out that a) the thick lips, the male body devoid of hair and the long legs of the African race make it more remote from the anthropoids than the Caucasian race, that b) Brazil, which today

² The Negro male is also perhaps a "superman" of whom we have to be jealous because he is "black." This may be the basis of the hysterical fear of the Negro rapist. Why is the ideal man "tall, dark and handsome"? Why is a female voice in the telephone a "blond voice"? Here is a big field for the psychoanalyst to explore.

does not discriminate against colored people, had slavery until 1888, and that numerous Americans in this country had parents who were serfs (in Europe) until 1863, that c) Negroes as a racial group have, according to Professor E. Hooton, the lowest percentage of rape in this country. Yet destroying the rationalizations will not attack the evil at its roots. Already Pascal says that the heart has reasons which reason is unaware of. It is our hearts, not our minds, which are sick. Even the popular trick of rationalization which culminates in the question whether one would like to see one's sister or daughter married to a Negro is a catch question which belongs into the same category. Since marriage has strong physical aspects and our sexual inclinations are strongly colored by fixed types, it is in a way easy to harp on the irrational prejudices. But why should Joan Green, who abhors the idea of marrying a man with red hair and also the idea of her sister becoming engaged to a man of that type, be forced to avoid all social contacts with males crowned by some piece of auburn fur? And even if I object (on purely emotional grounds) against my sister marrying a man with curly black hair and a brown skin, why should that compel me to shun a Negro in a hotel lobby, in a drawing-room, a country club or an office? (And why, may I ask, should my sister who has to live her own life, take my emotional prejudices seriously?)

The racial prejudices against Orientals (Chinese and Japanese) as well as against Jews take seemingly a different form; in reality we face here again our well known enemy, the inferiority complex. (Matters are not made better, but worse, by an inferiority complex on the receiving end). Of course, the inferiority complex lies here on the surface and is much more obvious than in the case of the Negro. Usually an intellectual superiority of the representatives of these old and established races is conceded. The Jews, the Chinese and the Japanese are clever, perhaps even diabolically clever. Their intellectual superiority is in the popular imagination compensated by a moral inferiority. (Here again is another field for the psychologist who should explain to us why real or supposed shrewdness is generally met with suspicion and why popular heroes from Parsifal to Joe Palooka were at all times surrounded by an aura of naivete if not of downright stupidity). As "strangers" wearing "impentetrable masks," they are supposed, like the Negro, to have a secret, but since they are "clever" their secret is of a collective and coordinated nature; no doubt they are involved in endless conspiracies recorded in unintelligible Hebrew letters and Chinese characters.

We have seen in earlier movies the simple-minded American detective again and again breaking up slit-eyed Orientals huddling together in sinister palavers by socking these yellow devils manly under their chins and we have also heard the sighs of horror when the first piece of evidence of foul murder was produced: a piece of paper covered with Chinese characters or Japanese kanas. That stuff was obviously not taught in Mechanicsville High, it was strange, it wore a "mask"; it was impenetrable, it was vicious and wicked. And a hopeless provincialism celebrated its triumphs.³

The Chinese are today in the class of "gallant allies," but the Japanese had to labor under a double burden. Yet it was interesting to see how the hatred against the American Japanese had gradually abated since 1943. The fact that one of the best-decorated American battalions is composed of Nisei has little to do with it. The masses rarely reason. But the hatred against these unfortunate Americans of Nipponese descent was in the same ratio as the Japanese victories; the sweep of Tojo's men in 1942 brought a feeling of helplessness, of a never openly acknowledged inferiority which has now been eliminated. Today everybody knows that the Japs can be licked and that they are licked. Fear has been changed into contempt. Hatred is in a way a form of respect.

Anti-Judaism is also based on a luciferian assumption: the Jews, as the "children of darkness" are clever but wicked. Yet the truth is that the highly propagandized Jewish shrewdness is often overrated; the Jewish mind works quickly and is also, contrary to Nazi claims, full of originality. There is only one Jewish triumph, the glory of all glories, and that is the first Christmas. There has never been one since, and thus the Jews are sad. It is exactly this Jewish melancholia which the racist, in favor of the luciferian concept, prefers to ignore.

In the case of Anti-Judaism, religious aspects, and, in my personal opinion, even metaphysical elements have to be taken into consideration, but their discussion is outside of the scope of this article.

At the bottom of racial intolerance is also the thinking in racial categories with fixed animosities. The intrinsic injustice of such an attitude is apparent if we remember the race or color of any person differing from us as the most salient feature of his personality. As

³ An interesting treatise could also be written on the psychologic evaluation of the *yellow color*.

has so often been pointed out, John Doe who had been tread on his toes by a hurrying Negro will upon his return home relate this incident by referring to the "culprit" as a Negro. Would he in the case of being injured by a fair blue-eyed young man refer to him as a "damned Nordic"? Certainly not.⁴ The physical pain has been inflicted on him not by a passerby but by a representative of the Negro race. Thinking in fixed human categories is unfortunately increasing rather than decreasing. The slow evaporation of religious values which stood for the discrimination between saints and sinners (and only secondarily for the distinction between orthodox and heterodox) has aggravated the problem in a society as consciously communitarian as the American one.

Since our problem itself is psychological and moral, but is concerned with attitudes toward physical aspects of the human personality only such an ideology can deal successfully with this disease which is 1) addressing itself with supernatural arguments and sanctions to all men and 2) relegates the physical part of the human person to a secondary place. Only certain religions fulfill these requirements, since they alone offer valid arguments against our tendency to yield to subjective emotions. We have yet to hear a philosophically watertight argument on a materialistic basis against racial intolerance. Of course, this problem can be alleviated by purely economic means, but this remains merely an alleviation; the root of the trouble is spiritual and ideological.

A glance at Dürer's *Totentanz* or the pictures of saints by Zurbarán featuring praying men and women with death skulls show us the deeper reason for the religious argument. The skull is the very symbol of the decayed flesh and the departed soul, it is beyond those vile earthly emotions which empoison down here our peace and mutual charity. And is exactly the religious decay which contributes to our general weakness and thus to the nefarious craving for uniformity. José Ortega y Gasset writes with great insight:

Probably the origin of this anti-individual fury lies in the fact that in their innermost hearts the masses feel themselves weak and defenseless in the face of their destiny. On a bitter and terrible page Nietzsche notes, how, in primitive societies which were weak when confronted with the difficulties

⁴ It is interesting that various committees dedicated to the improvement of race relations have made it a primary point to persuade their local newspapers not to use the race label in their police reporting.

of existence, every individual and original act was a crime, and the man who tried to lead a solitary life was a malefactor. He must in everything comport himself to the fashion of the tribe.⁵

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⁵ *Invertebrate Spain*. New York: W. W. Morton, 1937.